



#10 Mbonu Ojike Street

May 21, 2025

PRESS CONFERENCE STATEMENT

Delivered by OÑÚRÚBÉ on Monday, May 20, 2025

ARBITRARY ARREST, UNLAWFUL DETENTION, AND ABUSE OF POLICE POWER AGAINST THE IHEKWERE FAMILY IN IMO STATE —A CALL FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Good morning, esteemed members of the press, civil society partners, and fellow Nigerians.

Today we bring to public attention a deeply troubling matter that calls into question the professionalism, accountability, and constitutional compliance of some elements within the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), particularly in Imo State.

On Friday, 16th May 2025, OÑÚRÚBÉ received a distress call from Mrs. Chinaemere Ihekwere reporting that her husband, Mr. Darlington Ihekwere, had gone missing after honoring a police invitation by the Political Unit of the Imo State Police Command. He was accompanied by Mr. Bethel Iwuoha, a youth leader. The invitation stemmed from an earlier petition submitted by OÑÚRÚBÉ on behalf of Mrs. Apolonia Ihekwere – a widow suffering violent persecution and dispossession at the hands of her late husband's nephew, Mr. Donatus Ihekwere.

To our shock, we discovered that Darlington and Bethel were not only arrested without prior notice or warrant, but also transferred to the Anti-Kidnap Unit, widely known as "Tiger Base," under the pretense of being suspects in a kidnapping case. The so-called victim? None other than Mr. Donatus Ihekwere himself – the individual indicted in our petition for criminal intimidation, land grabbing, and harmful traditional practices.

Further inquiries revealed that the arrest was orchestrated not by investigative necessity, but allegedly on the instruction of the Commissioner of Police, conveyed through his personal assistant, Mr. Isaiah Kamantan. This deliberate misuse of police resources to subvert a pending petition and criminalize the complainants demonstrates the height of impunity.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONSTITUTIONAL BREACHES

We must emphasize that these actions are in flagrant violation of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended):

- ✓ . Section 35(1) guarantees every citizen the right to personal liberty and provides that no one shall be deprived thereof except in accordance with a procedure permitted by law.
- ✓ . Section 36(5) presumes every person innocent until proven guilty.
- ✓ . Section 34(1)(a) protects the dignity of every person and prohibits torture or inhuman treatment.

In addition, the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015, applicable in Imo State, criminalizes harmful widowhood practices and violence against women under Sections 11 and 23 respectively.

The Police Act, 2020 under Section 13(1)(b) mandates that the police must respect and protect human rights in all interactions, while Section 66 prohibits the use of police personnel for civil disputes or personal vendettas.

A PATTERN OF TARGETED HARASSMENT AND EXPLOITATION

This is not an isolated case. Our records show a consistent pattern of harassment. On March 10th, 2025, Mrs. Apolonia and her son were falsely arrested on kidnapping allegations, detained without charge, and forced to pay over ₦85,000 and later ₦65,000 for their release. Subsequently, a further ₦1,000,000 was demanded, of which ₦350,000 was paid under the assumption of bail at the Anti-Vice Unit. Instead of release, the victims were transferred to the Anti-Kidnap Unit and further detained.

This systemic abuse was only interrupted after national human rights actors intervened, leading to their release on April 10th. Since then, they have dutifully responded to police invitations. Yet, despite full cooperation, they have been told to settle the issue “amongst themselves,” with no meaningful pursuit of justice by the police.

We have credible reports that Mr. Donatus Ihekwere is a member of the Police Community Relations Committee (PCRC) and a known police informant in the region. He has allegedly used his affiliations to weaponize law enforcement against perceived opponents, exploit vulnerable families, and obstruct justice.

ALLEGED KIDNAP – A DUBIOUS NARRATIVE

We categorically refute the claim of kidnapping. On March 7th, 2025, Mr. Donatus Ihekwere was involved in a physical assault against Mrs. Apolonia. The local security outfit, Ebubeagu, intervened and temporarily held him at their facility to prevent further harm. His subsequent release three days later was confirmed by both community witnesses and the DPO of Mbieri Police Division. This has now been weaponized as a fabricated basis for a kidnapping claim, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

OUR POSITION AND DEMANDS

OÑÚRÚBÉ unequivocally condemns these acts of arbitrary arrest, unlawful detention, extortion, and collusion with alleged perpetrators of violence.

We hereby demand:

1. The immediate and unconditional release of Mr. Darlington Ihekwere and Mr. Bethel Iwuoha.
2. A public inquiry into the abuse of police authority in this matter, including the roles of Mr. Isaiah Kamantan and the officers of the Tiger Base Unit.
3. Disciplinary action against any officer found to have colluded with suspects to suppress legitimate petitions.
4. Immediate prosecution of Mr. Donatus Ihekwere for all acts of violence, fraudulent claims, and harmful traditional practices.
5. A directive from the Inspector-General of Police reinforcing the limits of the PCRC and penalizing the misuse of police-community affiliations.

CONCLUSION

Justice is not a privilege for the powerful. It is a right for all, especially the vulnerable. Nigeria cannot claim to be a democratic state governed by law if law enforcement agencies are allowed to descend into private militias for the highest bidder.

We call on the National Human Rights Commission, the Nigeria Bar Association, the IGP, and all relevant oversight institutions to take urgent action.

As Archbishop Desmond Tutu warned, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."

ÓÑÚRÚBÉ will not be silent. We will not relent. Justice must prevail.

Thank you.

Signed:



Marjorie Ezihe

Convener
ÓÑÚRÚBÉ Initiative.



Barr. Obisike F.N

ABOUT US:

Ónúrúbé is a gender based violence coalition of state and non-state actors in the five South East States of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo, focused on prevention, justice delivery, rehabilitation and empowerment for vulnerable and marginalized persons.